



Fire Management at Amistad National Recreation Area

Help the Park Plan for Fire

The National Park Service (NPS) is preparing to write the first Fire Management Plan (FMP) for Amistad National Recreation Area. We have sent you this newsletter to:

- Inform you about the fire management planning process; and
- Solicit your views and suggestions for incorporation into the new plan.

National parks with vegetation capable of burning are required, by order of Congress and the Director of the NPS, to prepare Fire Management Plans. These plans will be revised every five years. Until Amistad National Recreation Area completes its plan, all wildland fires must be suppressed and no prescribed burning can take place.

Ideally, the plan will provide a blueprint for utilizing the fire and fuel management practices and strategies that best protect the park's resources and values. Fuel management refers to methods used to reduce flammable vegetation that accumulates over time.

This fire planning process begins with an Environmental Assessment that analyzes the effects of fire plan alternatives. Input from the public and other interested parties is critical for determining the appropriate course of action. We invite you to read this newsletter, contact project team members with questions,



About the Park

Amistad National Recreation Area was officially created by an Act of Congress in 1990 in order to provide for public recreation use and enjoyment of the Amistad Reservoir and surrounding lands and protect the area's resources. The park is located in Val Verde County just northwest of Del Rio, Texas and about 150 miles west of San Antonio. It extends for 83 miles up the Rio Grande, 25 miles up the Devils River, and 14 miles up the Pecos River. The majority of the park's 58,500 acres are underwater.



Most of the 950,000 people who visit each year take advantage of the park's boating and fishing opportunities, but the park also offers swimming, scuba diving, picnicking, hiking, camping, and hunting.

The area is world-renowned for its archaeological resources, which includes some of the largest and best-preserved multicolor rock art in North America. The park intersects three biological provinces — the Chihuahuan Desert, Edwards Plateau, and Tamaulipan Thornscrub — making the area biologically rich as well.

Fire Planning Issues

During the planning process, we need to identify important issues related to fire and fuel management at the park and anticipate how our actions will affect those issues. This preliminary list of issues was developed by park staff. Although fire can have a negative impact on some park resources, these impacts can be minimized through effective mitigation practices while fire and fuels are managed to protect public safety and cultural resources and promote a healthier ecosystem.

Concern	Issues	Opportunities/Mitigation
Public and staff safety	<p>Fuel accumulation around structures puts structures inside and outside the park at risk.</p> <p>Fires can be dangerous for park personnel engaged in fire management activities, especially in areas of heavy fuel buildup and inadequate escape routes.</p>	<p>Prescribed fire (an intentionally set fire used to achieve a specific goal) can be an effective tool for reducing hazardous fuels, especially when used in combination with manual and mechanical methods for fuel reduction.</p> <p>Firefighter safety can be protected by using a flexible approach to fighting fires that calls for suppression (stopping a fire from spreading) when feasible, but containment (allowing a fire to spread within a defined area) when the safety of firefighters could be at risk.</p>
Visitor experience	<p>Fires could temporarily restrict public access to some areas.</p> <p>Due to recent low water levels, shrubs have become established around the reservoir in areas that will be underwater when water levels rise. These shrubs will become dangerous snags once they are underwater and could threaten boats, especially near access points.</p>	<p>Prescribed fires can be planned to take place during times when they will not have a major impact on visitor activities.</p> <p>Prescribed fire, in conjunction with manual and mechanical fuel reduction activities, can be used to reduce or eliminate shrubs near access points and other areas where they could pose a major hazard when inundated.</p>
Cultural resources	<p>Fires could damage or destroy archeological resources, including rock art, artifacts, and organic materials.</p> <p>People engaged in fire management activities may remove or inadvertently destroy archeological resources.</p>	<p>Prescribed fires and manual fuel reduction methods can reduce fuel loads around sensitive sites. The Park Archeologist can determine the proper mitigation technique for each type of site.</p> <p>Firefighters can be instructed about cultural resources protection laws, and all fire and fuel management activities can be coordinated with the Park Archeologist, minimizing the likelihood that sites will be damaged.</p>
Vegetation	<p>Fire could promote the growth of non-native species, including tamarisk, giant cane, and bufflegass.</p> <p>Native trees could be killed by fires, and native vegetation may be slow to recover following fires due, in part, to the presence of trespass sheep and goats in the park.</p>	<p>Wildfires in riparian areas can be suppressed or contained. Prescribed fire can be used as part of an integrated non-native plant management program.</p> <p>Containment and suppression of wildfires, in conjunction with fuel reduction methods, can be used to protect areas with native trees. Manual or mechanical treatments may help keep non-native vegetation out of burned areas.</p>
Wildlife	<p>Some animals may be injured or killed during wildfires.</p>	<p>Efforts can be made to suppress most wildfires in the park. In many cases, areas can be quickly surveyed before prescribed fire is used in order to reduce the risk to wildlife.</p>

Fire Management Plan Alternatives

Amistad National Recreation Area staff have identified two alternatives for fire and fuel management at the park. We invite you to comment on these alternatives or suggest others.

Alternative A: No Action

In the absence of an approved Fire Management Plan, Amistad National Recreation Area must continue to suppress all wildland fires. Containment, rather than suppression, is permitted if the risk to firefighters is too great. Containment is typically used when fires occur in remote areas, fuel loads are high, and the terrain is steep, making escape difficult for firefighters. This combination of suppression and containment is called Appropriate Management Response, or AMR.

Under Alternative A, prescribed fires are not utilized, nor are any other methods of fuel reduction. A prescribed fire is a fire that is intentionally set by park staff or other qualified personnel in order to achieve some specific goal. These fires are carefully planned and managed to ensure that they remain under control at all times.

Alternative B: AMR/ Prescribed Fire Program

Under this alternative, AMR, as described above, continues to be used for all wildfires in the park, whether they are natural or human- caused.

Prescribed fire, as well as manual and mechanical fuel reduction methods, may be used to achieve safety and resource management objectives.

Prescribed fire, manual and mechanical fuel reduction, and/or mechanical construction of fire breaks may be used to reduce fuels near park structures and along the park boundary near private housing developments. Prescribed fire and other fuel reduction methods may also be used to protect fragile archeological sites and areas with unique biological resources, such as large native trees. Prescribed fires may be conducted to reduce brush in some areas of the park, especially near boat access points, to ensure that boats will be able to utilize these areas safely

as water levels fluctuate. This effort may involve the use of manual or mechanical methods to collect shrubs into brush piles, followed by burning those piles. Or, firefighters may burn an area in order to destroy shrubs and promote grassland.

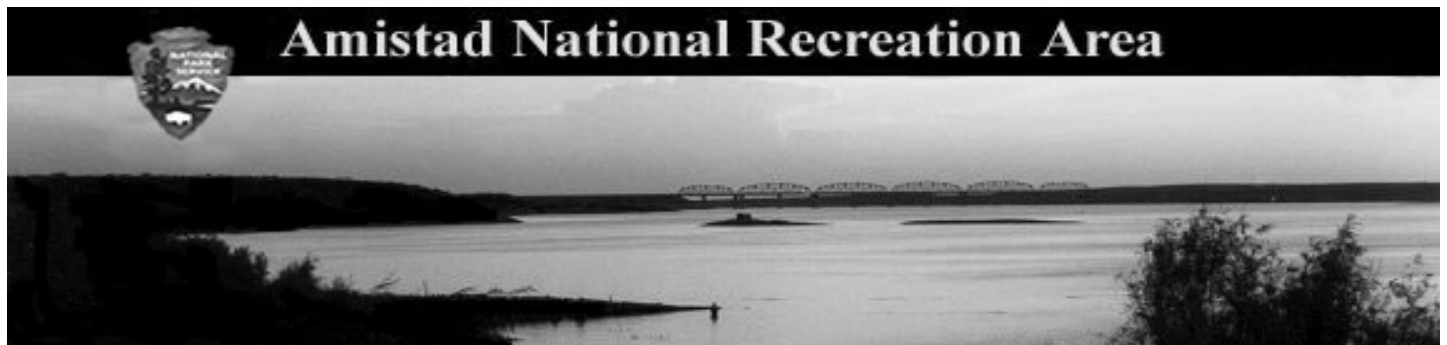
Fire may be used as part of an integrated non- native plant management program to control tamarisk and giant cane. This would involve using prescribed fire to clear areas that have become overrun by these invasive species.



Invasive non-native plants like tamarisk and giant cane are common in the park along the Rio Grande.



The state-threatened Texas indigo snake reaches its western range limit at Amistad NRA.



We are just about to begin writing the Environmental Assessment for this project. This is your initial opportunity to share your concerns and suggestions with us. **Please submit any comments by March 10.** Once the draft Environmental Assessment has been written, you will have 30 days to review it. If any significant changes need to be made to the draft as a result of your comments, the new version will be made available for another 30 day review.